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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002447

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV KPAL ASEC JO

SUBJECT: AL-NAKHBA DAY PASSES QUIETLY IN JORDAN -- WAITING FOR A POLITICAL PROCESS?

Classified By: PolCouns Doug Silliman for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Traditionally a day of protests in Jordan, the May 15 remembrance of al-Nakhba (the "Catastrophe" -- the 1948 founding of Israel) passed quietly in Jordan this year. The Professional Associations sponsored a pro-Palestinian rally in the Shmeisani neighborhood of Amman. A large number of police watched over the peaceful rally, but did not interfere. UNRWA sources indicate that Jordan's refugee camps were quiet, with the exception of the Baqaa camp north of Amman, where a "spontaneous demonstration" tried unsuccessfully to reach the main Amman-Irbid highway.

¶2. (C) In a May 15 meeting, GOJ Department of Palestinian Affairs Director General Abdulkarim Abulhaija had told refcoord he expected Nakhba day to pass quietly in Jordan. The GOJ was not aware of any large demonstrations planned in the camps. In general, Abulhaija said, "this is a moment of calm in Jordan," as everyone is waiting, hopefully, for a political process to restart and take root. Abulhaija, who had just completed several days of meetings with camp leadership throughout the Amman area, said refugees are even talking about the need to avoid violence -- particularly in the West Bank -- to ensure that a political dialogue can begin and be successful. Noting that refugees just a few weeks ago had been highly critical of the U.S., Abulhaija said they are now talking about the "independence" of the U.S. Administration and its apparent willingness to "stand up" to pro-Israeli interests. Abulhaija added that the U.S. now needed to deliver. If political progress is not made in the next few weeks, or if Israel launches significant new military assaults, he believes the mood could rapidly turn in the camps and in the broader Arab street.

¶3. (C) In contrast, however, UNRWA staff told RefFSN that a group of refugees in Baqaa camp said this week that they blamed the United States for Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and were upset to learn that a U.S. delegation had recently visited the camp.

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COMMENT  
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¶4. (C) This year's Nakhba Day passed with barely a whimper, especially as compared to the clashes that took place last year on May 11 in the run-up to al-Nakhba. In the wake of Israel's withdrawal from West Bank cities and with the daily dose of images of Palestinian suffering reduced, Jordanians seem to be waiting to see if U.S. and international statements about the need for a political process and creation of a Palestinian state will be acted on.  
Gnehm